




Concerns of novice teacher educators: a narrative self-study

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Abstract

In the recent years, teacher education research has focused on teacher educators' experiences, identities, and professional development. However, it remains unexplored how teacher educators' concerns and professional learning influence novices' identities during their first years of work in non-Western contexts. Therefore, this study examines concerns and professional development activities of a Malawian novice teacher educator. The study employed a self-study methodology with the help of a lifeline chart to reveal self-critical reflections. Data were analysed using KH coder software, a quantitative content analysis software that aided identification of themes and co-occurrence network of words. Findings showed that the novice teacher educator experienced concerns about subject content knowledge, forming a personal teaching approach and learners' assessment, self-image in the student teachers' eyes, and job security. The novice's significant professional development activities include learning from mistakes, upgrading academic degrees, conducting research, joining an academic network and learning from colleagues of the same cohort. The paper discusses key lessons from this self-study and areas for further research while acknowledging limitations of self-study research genre. Chief among the lessons learnt is that this self-study is a professional development activity from which the authors have learnt concerns of novice teacher educators and the process of constructing a teacher educator identity.

Keywords Novice teacher educator · Concerns · Malawi · Self-study · Professional development

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Introduction

Teacher educators influence student teachers' learning and the overall quality of teacher education program (Ping et al. 2018; Smith 2005). One can become a teacher educator through several routes, including direct entry after pursuing a PhD, transfer from being a school teacher to a teacher educator, or by working at both a school and a teacher education institute (Murray et al. 2021; Smith 2017). Each of the entry trajectories has its own strengths and weaknesses since teacher educators' duties vary from teaching, research, and social contribution (White 2019). Generally, teacher educators work in complicated environments, which relate interacting with different stakeholders, such as learners, institutions, and other professionals in the field (Loughran and Hamilton 2016). To socialize in the workplace, novice teacher educators with about a three-year length of experience as a teacher educator struggle, especially getting used to the workplace culture, building relationship with others and developing proper teaching manner and method (Murray and Male 2005).

Meanwhile, the understanding about professional lives of teacher educators is covered by a rich literature from the Western and Middle-East countries (Izadinia 2014). The significance of this study is to raise the voice of a non-Western country—Malawi into the literature. Developing countries are putting efforts to improve the quality of teacher education. As a result, teacher educators are expected to continuously deepen their knowledge and skills. Pressures are increasing and novices are vulnerable while coping with this increasing and intense requirements from work (Nguyen 2023).

The present study takes a self-study design to capture a story of one novice teacher educator with a pseudonym as Andy. Through a self-study approach, this study presents dilemmas of the novice and how he attempts to overcome those challenges in his workplace. Life teaching experience told in his story brings us to the complexity of teaching itself and efforts of the newbie to master both teaching and other work demands (Loughran 2004). This study aims to identify Andy's concerns and professional learning during a process of forming his teacher educator identity. To achieve the research purpose, two research questions are raised:

1. What are Andy's concerns during his first years of work as a teacher educator?
2. How did Andy deal with those concerns?

Literature review

Concerns of novice teacher educators

Concern refers to matters which make teacher educators feel unease and uncertain; hence, teacher educators try to cope with them in their work (Fuller 1974). The process of transitioning from schools to teacher education is characterized by frustrations, anxiety, and uncertainty even when the novices have rich work experience as

schoolteachers (Grierson 2010; Shagrir 2010). During this novice period, main concerns are about teaching skills, subject knowledge, research into teacher education and forming relationships with student teachers and other professionals at the workplace (Van Velzen et al. 2010; Williams and Ritter 2010).

First, newbies search for a personal and proper teaching approach which matches with their teaching beliefs (Grierson 2010; Swennen et al. 2009). The concern about teaching skills relates to learners' evaluation, classroom management, preparing teaching materials and teaching with student teachers' different abilities (Murray and Male 2005; Van der Klink et al. 2017). For those with former teaching experience at schools, they firstly depend on their previous teaching experience; yet they soon realize differences between teaching school students and adult learners (Richards and Ressler 2017). During reflection process of finding a suitable pedagogy of teacher education, novices experience clashes of ideals and ideas (Swennen et al. 2009). They need to balance between what they think as being good for student teachers and what student teachers consider as good for themselves.

Second, the novices aim to build harmonious relationship with student teachers and other colleagues in a professional community (Williams 2014). Gaining credibility is important to gradually form the identity as a teacher educator from the eyes of student teachers and colleagues (Murray and Male 2005). How to work with others in a harmonious manner is one step in the process of socialization into the workplace. Another concern is about research ability and capacity building (McAnulty and Cuenca 2014). Although novices see frictions of research and teaching due to the unrelatability between the two (Shagrir 2010), they are curious and acknowledge the importance of research in their work. A pressure to undertake and publish academic research is competitive at research-intensive universities (McAnulty and Cuenca 2014). Hence, to fulfil research publication as a job requirement and for promotion purposes, novices are prompted to develop their research capacity (Murray and Male 2005). At this stage, research knowledge is more about how to discover novel research ideas, write the research report and disseminate the research findings.

These above concerns are for their survival and socialization at work (Murray and Male 2005). Induction programs are not common for neophytes because they are assumed to be experts in their field (Harrison and McKeon 2010; Van Velzen et al. 2010). Hence, novices are at risk of the "imposter syndrome" indicating that they try to cover with a coat of being a teacher educator outside but with a professional storm inside (Richards and Ressler 2017). Feeling insecure about capacity and credibility urges novices to continuously equip themselves with skills and knowledge.

Professional development of novice teacher educators

Novices are rarely satisfied with the induction and professional training provided when entering the new workplace (Izadinia 2014). Yet, teacher educators can self-study to meet their professional needs from teaching, pedagogical and research knowledge (Smith 2020). Individual learning is the most common way of learning for novices (Ben-Peretz et al. 2010). They learn through try and error as they reflect on their practice. Reflection on their teaching method, beliefs and learners'

evaluation supports them to adjust their approach (Ping et al. 2018). Novices also join upgrading programmes, such as Masters or Doctoral courses to advance their field knowledge and research ability. Doctoral course is found to significantly increase the professionals' confidence and capacity in doing research.

Collaborative learning, such as discussion and doing research with others, also contributes to their knowledge base (Shagrir 2010). Joining self-study or collaborative research groups has the potential to increase novices' self-reflection, revision of their teaching approaches, and forming a teacher educator identity when they contribute to the knowledge base of teacher educators (Richards and Ressler 2017). Novices are also reported to be more interested in working with more experienced professionals than with the same cohort. However, other studies suggest that learning from diverse others shows its powerfulness for novices seek advice and practical methods to solve their problems regardless of being juniors or seniors (Swennen et al. 2009).

Building on the rich literature of professional development of novices in the Western and Middle Eastern context, the present study explores concerns and professional development of a Malawian novice teacher educator.

Context of the study

Initial teacher education in Malawi is offered in Teacher Training Colleges (hereafter, TTCs) for primary school teachers, Colleges of Education, and Faculties of Education in Universities for secondary school teachers. The TTCs offer two-year long certificate programs, while colleges of education and universities offer four-year degree programs for secondary school teachers. The in-service programs are coordinated by the Department of Teacher Education and Development through various Teacher Development Centres and clusters spread across the country (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology MoEST 2008). The professional development activities are supported by education officials such as Primary Education Advisors and external agencies such as Non-Governmental Organizations. The Continuing Professional Development Framework (MoEST 2018) provides policy guidelines for professional development of teachers and teacher educators, including planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Teacher educators are recruited based on prior teaching experience and a minimum of a Bachelor of Education degree (for Colleges of Education and TTCs) and master's degree for university-based teacher education programs. Teacher educators are ranked in terms of position such as tutor, lecturer, senior lecturer or professor. This paper focuses on university-based teacher educators. Existing research provides insights into challenges, activities and content of professional development for teacher educators in Malawi (Chiziwa 2013; Stuart et al. 2000). However, the focus has been on teacher educators in general, and limited to certain subject areas such as mathematics (e.g., Mazolo 2018). To gain a deeper understanding of teacher educators' professional development processes and support, there is a need for further research on professional development of teacher educators at various stages of their career.

The present self-study provides other researchers with a starting point to pursue this line of research. By situating the experience of a novice teacher educator in the local and international literature, an understanding of professional life phase is developed, while at the same time suggesting areas for further research.

Methodology

The self-study

This paper falls under self-study research genre, in which teacher educators study their own practice or their professional growth. The teacher educator studied in this paper is one of the authors. The pseudonym Andy serves as a persona to better tell his experiences as a novice teacher educator. Self-study is performed under the participant’s narratives using a lifeline chart to capture lived experiences as a school student, his former teaching experience, and his process of becoming a teacher educator. Narrative method has long been used for collecting teachers’ experiences in classrooms, their professional development (Elbaz-Luwisch 2007), and their professional life phases (Sikes et al. 1985). The first author utilized a lifeline map, which describes schooling history and occupational choices to provoke Andy’s reflections about what he has been through (Fig. 1).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for approximately three hours in the year 2020, in Japan. The first author played the role of an interviewer, asking reflective questions. The first author was Andy’s friend during his PhD course in Japan. Self-study research conducted with collaboration among trusted colleagues can

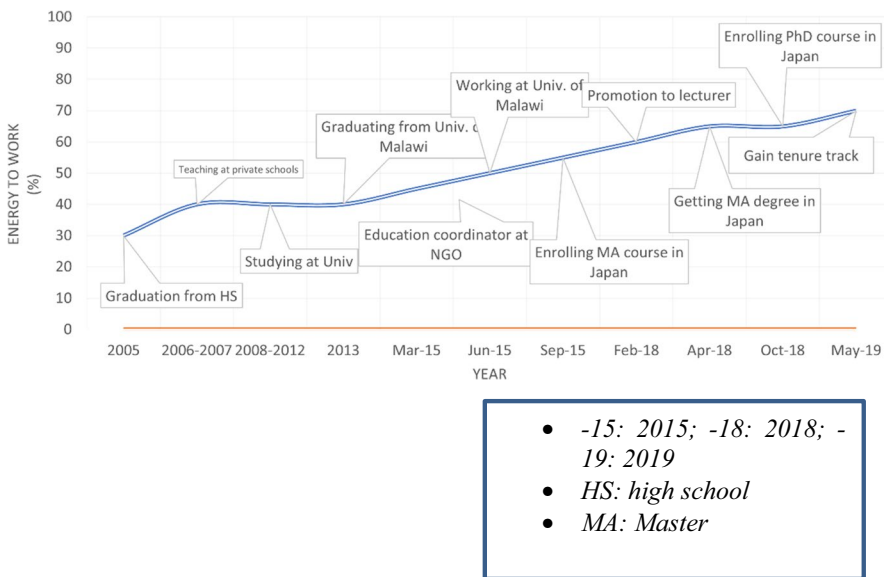


Fig. 1 Lifeline chart of Andy

enrich the data interpretation and generate an in-depth understanding of the story (Fletcher and Bullock 2012; Vanassche and Kelchtermans 2015). Some of the interview questions included: before becoming a teacher educator, what was your occupation? Why did you decide to become a teacher educator? When you first became a teacher educator, what were your fears? To manage source discrepancies and disagreements, some interview questions were repeated.

Data analysis

The first author analysed the interview and lifeline chart independently. Content analysis was used to find patterns, categories, or themes from the text (Patton 2014). Open coding to pick exact words or phrases in the text was done to identify useful segments of data. After working on the entire manuscripts, codes conveying similar ideas are grouped into categories (Merriam and Tisdell 2015).

To minimise the researchers' prejudices, the KH coder software (Higuchi 2016), which is a software for quantitative content analysis was employed to see constellations of themes in the textual data (Danowski 1993). In other words, co-occurrence network of words, which shows relatedness of terms in the text, was extracted by the KH software. Two sets of data analysis from manual coding and the software were compared and presented in the finding section. The initial draft of the narrative was developed collaboratively by the participant and the first author, which also helped to address possible discrepancies and disagreements.

Reliability and validity of the study

In her self-study research, Cochran-Smith (2005) acknowledged that self-study inquiry as a research methodology is criticised because it raises questions about reliability and validity of the findings. Critics claim that practitioner research studies like self-study do not meet the necessary standards of rigorous research and fail to make a significant contribution to the existing literature in the field of educational research. These criticisms have prompted self-study researchers to propose some guidelines for enhancing trustworthiness of self-study research (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001; Feldman 2003). Based on a review of previous self-study research, Pithouse-Morga (2022) suggests that the reliability of self-study research can be enhanced by involving critical collaboration and self-inquiry, giving evidence of impact of research, and making the research public to support robust conclusions and implications. In this self-study, we followed these guidelines to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

To facilitate self-inquiry, the first author sent the transcription and preliminary report of the data to the participant for his comment and validation. The first author also engaged in post-interview interactions with the participant, including further clarification about unclear areas in the course of data interpretation and reporting. Besides, the present study combines both a content analysis and a new way of organizing self-study data by using a software to increase the validity of the analysis (Samaras et al. 2004). As one way of involving critical collaboration,

we invited a critical reader, who critiqued the interpretation and representation constructed from the interview. The reader in question is a Japanese national currently working as an Associate Professor of teacher education at Hiroshima University. At the time of this study, the critical reader was the research supervisor of the authors of this paper. His feedback focused on the structure of the paper, improving methodology to convince readers and the overall significance of the self-study. For example, he commented “In my opinion, in reviewing previous studies, it is necessary to examine the content (findings) and the research methods and discuss the validity of the research methods in this paper”. These comments promoted the authors to revise the methodology and findings sections. Similarly, the authors considered the feedback received from the reviewers of this journal as a form of critical collaboration and a way of making the research public. By candidly responding to such reviews, the authors have demonstrated their openness to feedback.

Findings

Concerns during the first four years of being a teacher educator

Words with the same color indicate a cluster of topics (subgraph) present in the data (Higuchi 2016). Words in the same cluster are connected by the solid line, while dot lines are used for words in different cluster. From Fig. 2, the three biggest subgraphs are in emerald (01), yellow (02), purple (03) which are the frequently mentioned themes in the data. Three small subgraphs are in red (04), blue (05), orange (06) and green (07). Two tiny subgraphs are in pink and grey. The bigger the size of the bubbles are, the more frequently the words were mentioned in the data.

Subject content knowledge

The data shows that the first concern is the lack of subject content knowledge because Andy's bachelor's degree is not about his current teaching major. This topic is shown in the Cluster 2 in yellow colour. In the interview, Andy said:

My major concern was, one, I am teaching something that I did not have enough content about. The course I was teaching at that moment is just, I thought it is not my major, so my concern was how do I show people that I know what I'm teaching.

Yet, his bachelor's degree with distinction helped him with a certain degree of confidence and motivation to work. He said:

I think I was confident that I can do this job because my bachelor background is very good, actually. Mine is first class (distinction) that is very important to boost my confidence.

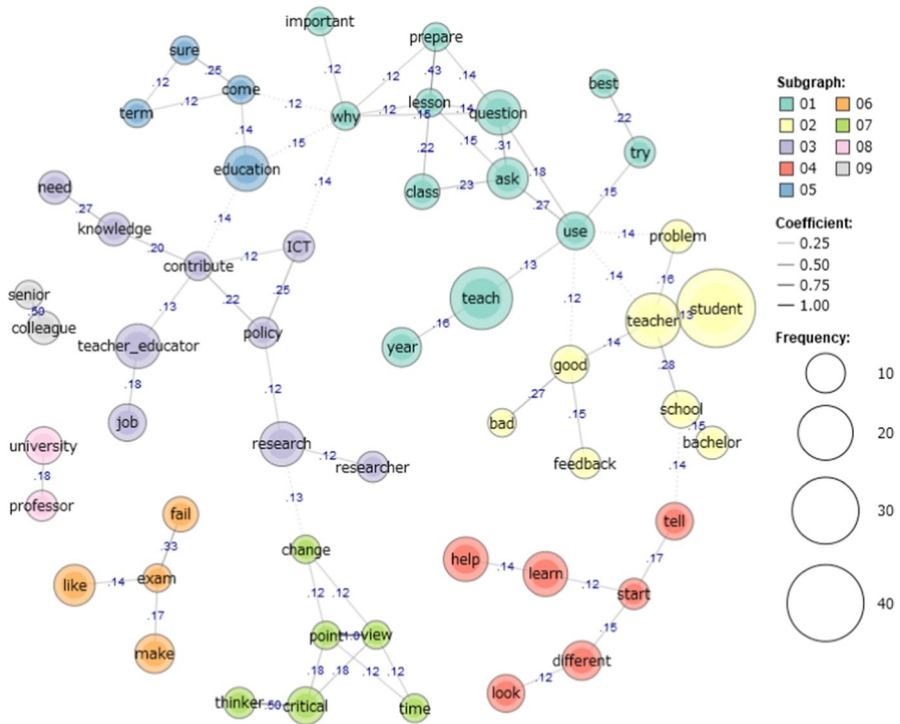


Fig. 2 Co-occurrence network of words in the interview data, performed by KH coder software

Teaching approach and learners’ assessment

Andy reported to have teaching experience at a private high school, so he relied on this experience to teach in the University. Yet, he realized the difference between working with school students and adult learners. He said:

Um. I think the teaching part yes, I ’m confident. However, because I have only taught for one year, my understanding of every new teaching activity is new. You cannot only rely on experience to teach students because each group of students is unique. I think I don’t know much.

Andy tried to generate “a new way of teaching” with a focus on “critical thinking” for his learners through asking questions, letting learners think and find answers by themselves. This new teaching idea is described in the blue cluster with key words of teach, use, try, best, ask, question, lesson, prepare, why and important. He shared that:

Normally, we want to know how the students do something. But I want to go beyond the “why”. Like in the book, we learn about the student-centred approach right. But I want them to know, why the students should be the centre. What is wrong with other way of teaching. So, I want them to begin to

raise those questions but they expect me to tell them, so this is how you prepare a student-centred lesson. That's important, but for me, to make them start making questions. Or even in ICT, it is encouraged to use ICT but I want them to ask questions. Why ICT? We shouldn't celebrate everything [...] Oh I love it. I want them to question, think, not just accept.

Cluster 07 in green with keywords of critical, thinking, point, view, change, and time illustrates Andy's serious concern to develop this thinking and learning in class. For example, Andy said:

My priority is to make my students become critical thinkers. Yes, so when I try to use the methods that, most of informal questions [...] that's my approach I want them to think, I don't want to tell them because this is not the nature of education. I ask them difficult questions, but I don't answer the questions.

In assessing learners, he designed the exam questions regarding lesson planning based on problem-based design.

My field is, we look at, how we plan a lesson. So, I gave them a case study. Yeah, I gave them hypothetical class: a class of students with mixed abilities and different interests. I asked them can you prepare a lesson for this class? They failed. I also tried to ask them, to teach them, about how best they can use technology in teaching. I don't ask them how you use technology, but I give them the situation. Can you tell me a class that can be supported by the internet? I want them to think.

This teaching approach may have originated from his belief of soundness of self-study, study background on educational philosophy and the influence of experts in the field.

I believe that people can make progress and learn by themselves [...]. I expect them [student teachers] to be thinkers, expect them to become researchers. Even in my ambition, when I talk about my research, I want to also talk from the critical theory point of view. So that's my standpoint of view. I want them to raise questions that challenge the status quo, not just accept them.

Self-image in student teachers' eyes

Andy further reported to have faced a challenge of applying the above-highlighted teaching method in order to satisfy the grade-focused learning of his student teachers. The orange cluster formed by keywords of exam, make, fail, like says an issue that student teachers fail Andy's exam and make learners feel not liking him. Andy said:

Majority of my students failed one of my exams, 2% out of 256 people and I shouldn't celebrate that. This is the first term in my teaching as a teacher-educator. This time I think I need to think about teaching from different point of view.

Reaction of students brought “mixed” feelings and reflection to Andy. He looked back and questioned his teaching feeling uneasy because the result was not what he expected initially.

It helps me to question my own approach, what did I do wrong? [...] This time I think I need to think about teaching from different point of view. I don't feel ok because my intention was not for them to fail. I'm happy for them to pass. The other reaction is how I can do it in the future. They don't like me, but its ok. It's not my problem.

In Fig. 2, the emerald cluster about new teaching approach links with a part of the yellow cluster with keywords of good, bad and feedback showing the relatedness between the two clusters. It seems the student teachers reacted resistantly towards Andy's question-provoking teaching shown through their class evaluation. For him, learners' evaluation can help lecturers to learn; yet, it is problematic if that result is used to judge whether he is a good or bad teacher. Andy confessed:

I remember when I was teaching this year. My student teachers complained that you just ask, ask us questions. Where are the answers? [...] Learners evaluate lectures and that's our policy. They fill the form, and I don't have problem with that because it helps us to develop ourselves as a teacher. But I will have problems if they use those forms to evaluate whether I'm a good or bad teacher. They do, now they're saying that I'm a bad teacher because my student teachers fail the exam. I'm sure some lecturers deliberated that they make simple exams so they can get good feedback. But do you think that we can improve teaching and learning? Just as them, 100% of learners pass and they give good feedback. No, I can't do that.

This idea clash between Andy and his learners is caused by the performance-based learning prevalent in the university. Learners care much more about grades not knowledge from the course. Andy said:

I am confident to introduce the new way of teaching, but the student teachers are not willing to adapt. Uhm, because what they care the most is the grade, exam grade. You know, this is what they care the most, so, even when we were teaching, their focus is how much I am going to score, not what I should know from this course. My concern is I want them to know but their concern is what should be my score. So, we have different ambitions.

He also deliberately shared that after all, he was concerned about how learners look at them and compare him others and judge him. He said:

I also concerned how the students look at me, sometimes the students compare you with the experienced professors. My worries, how they judge me.

Job security

Along with worries about teaching and learning, Andy was concerned about job security because he expected a long-term position in the university. The requirement

for this position is at least a master's degree. This urged him to quickly register for a Master and Doctoral course.

Professional development during the first four years

Learning from mistakes

To overcome the challenges, Andy tries his best to manage his teaching and learns from doing things. Lack of support from colleagues makes his self-study activities powerful in the process of collecting experiences. He confessed: I know things by doing them, learn from mistakes. It [self-study] works very well for me [laugh].

Upgrading academic degrees

After 4 years in the position of a teacher educator, even with only one year of actual teaching in class, Andy's worries switched from instructional knowledge to more specialized knowledge in his field of research. The critical incident that marked changes in his mindset and career was his education to Master and PhD course in Japan after one year of working at the university.

My work on Master course tried to expose me to different ways of thinking, knowledge and my confidence to share my knowledge at the conference. But, now, when I reflected on that presentation, I felt terribly bad [laugh].

Andy got a job promotion as a permanent lecturer at his working place after obtaining his Master's degree.

Conducting research, joining an academic network

Andy acknowledged the importance of doing research in educational ICT as his field, having an academic paper and joining a professional network to advance his expertise, to expand his professional relationship, and to become a specialist in his field in the future. He said:

Now, I am a member of organizers for a network of teacher educators. The network makes me visible to other people. The other thing is to help me to know what other people are doing. [...] Because of my role is not only to teach, but we also do community service, called consultancy. And people consult me based on specialization, I cannot specialize if I don't do research. When people approach me, I should be speaking for formal interviews. [...] For now, I'm contributing for TE policy so how can we integrate ICT in TE institution.

Learning from the same cohort

Andy had no mentor to guide him; and his senior colleagues were "too busy" to give help. Andy expressed:

I think it's rare to talk about those issues [teaching content and methods]. You can get feedback from senior colleagues, but they are always busy. So, I don't like that.

Learning from colleagues at the same level seems to have been helpful for Andy because they were "honest". Andy confessed:

Recently I noticed that it's helpful to talk to colleagues. They question your work, so important. Talking with people at the same level as mine, when you talk to peers, they are very honest.

Discussion

This research shows that self-study research using a narrative approach gives access to explore a practitioner's reflection about the process of building a teacher educator's expertise and identity. Firstly, Andy's concerns at the beginning stage relate to his instructional knowledge, self-image in the students' eyes, and job-security. These concerns concur with previous studies which reported that novice teacher educators are challenged by subject knowledge, teaching skills, researching, and building relationships with others (Dengerink et al. 2015; McAnulty and Cuenca 2014; Shagrir 2010). Although Andy possessed a bachelor's degree (with distinction), which certainly boosted his confidence, teaching adult learners' challenges not only an inexperienced person but also former school-teachers (Williams 2014). In addition, Andy's concern about self-adequacy refers to self-awareness whether he is capable of what he is doing, and how his students feel about him, which is also found in the case of beginning teachers (Fuller 1974).

At this stage, he attempted to implement a new way of teaching based on his deep-seated intrinsic motivation. Facing conflicting teaching interests between himself, his students, and the university culture formed by senior colleagues, his fear of ruining his image in the students' eyes implies that the person is highly aware of forming good reputation among his students (Williams and Ritter 2010). Clashes of ideas with others at the workplace are not so unfamiliar when looking at findings of previous research, which reported that novices suffer from belief clashes within themselves and other stakeholders in their working place (Swennen et al. 2009).

To overcome these concerns, Andy applied a variety of learning techniques, with the most influential ones including learning from mistakes, upgrading his education to Masters and Doctoral levels, conducting research and learning from colleagues of the same cohort. A great amount of self-reflection and perseverance during self-learning process served as a rich resource for development of teacher educators at the beginning (Swennen et al. 2009). Communication with other colleagues also enhances professional awareness when there is no proper induction program (Ping et al. 2018; Shagrir 2010). However, Andy's preference of working with colleagues at the same level contrasts with what previous studies found among neophytes, who are interested in interaction with more senior colleagues inside their organization (Van der Klink et al. 2017). This feeling is caused by hierarchical boundaries

between seniors and juniors at his university, which is highly contextual and unfound in the current literature.

Secondly, the novice teacher educator attempts to build multiple identities concurrently. The first notable identity is to be a teacher of teacher, which became visible after the first year of working and studying content on teacher education during Andy's upgrading programme to a Masters' degree. The process of becoming a teacher educator did not stop here since Andy realized another role as a researcher in the field. Furthermore, his identity formation seemed to be the opposite of what is shown in other studies (e.g., Amott 2018). Amott (2018) stated that none of the novice teacher educators labelled them as such, which means they do not sense their identity as a teacher educator. In the case of Andy, two identities of being a teacher of teachers and a researcher seem to exist simultaneously. They overlap, creating multi-layered feature of his identity.

Developing to be a better teacher educator, Andy's mindset gradually transformed from a teacher of teachers to a researcher. Figure 3 illustrates compositions of teacher educator's identity which is revealed through Andy's professional growth. The latter layers are generated and cover the former layers with the core as a personal teaching belief. This transformation of identity is not automatic but being strongly shaped by an incident, which was his pursuit of a Masters and Doctoral degree studies in Japan. These upgrading programs affected not only his research mindset, but also his job promotion. Progressing in his career, his attempts and energy enriched his specialty to get ready for different roles in the future, including being a specialist in his research field.

It is stated that the blend of two sub-identities as a teacher of teachers and a researcher brings a sense of teacher educator identity (Smith and Flores 2019). Andy succeeded in his transformation from non-teaching staff to a self as a teacher at a university; and from a lecturer to a researcher by expressing his comfort and capacity to bear his dual roles (Murray and Male 2005).

Conclusion

This self-study illustrates experiences of a novice teacher educator working in a university-based teacher education programme in Malawi. Andy's experiences are shaped by the local context of his work with large classes, dominance of exam-oriented teaching and learning at the university, and the university staff's evaluation policies. We also notice that Andy's study abroad experience and content of his

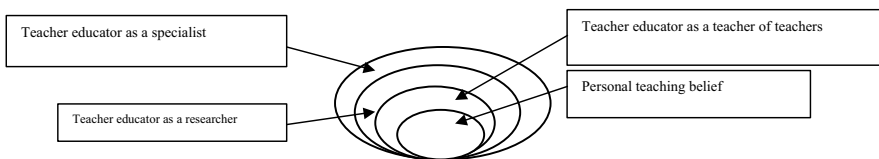


Fig. 3 Composition of teacher educators' identity of Andy

upgrading program at a Japanese university mediated how he understood himself as a professional and what he imagined becoming. By discussing Andy's experiences in the context of the international literature, we observe that Andy's experiences seem to resonate with professional development concerns of novice teacher educators reported elsewhere, such as the European countries.

While our study demonstrates the usefulness of a narrative approach, we acknowledge that the limitation to this study lies in its use of data from one participant, which restrains the findings from scientific generalization. However, our motivation for this self-study, as is the case with other researchers, was to generate insights into understanding and possibly change who we are as teacher educators. The narrative we have constructed through this self-study affords us an opportunity to represent what we have learnt by studying a novice teacher educators' own practice. Chief among the lessons learnt is that this self-study is a professional development activity from which we have learnt concerns of novice teacher educators and the construction of a teacher educator identity. Through this self-study, we have also experienced the challenges of conducting self-study research that we only read in the literature. For example, one of the challenges we experienced was to defend some reviewer's critical questions concerning the insufficiency of the measures taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the self-study findings. We were also criticized that the utilization of a lifeline map as the primary source of data for stimulating reflections introduces subjectivity and bias into the study.

The other merit of this self-study is in providing a starting point for other researchers to explore professional development of novice teacher educators in a non-western context. Further research can also examine teacher educators' identity transformation after the novice period in contexts of non-western countries with a larger number of participants. Additionally, the international literature suggests that teacher educators perform one or more of the following roles: researcher, gatekeeper, curriculum developer, teacher of teacher or coach. In this study, Andy's reflection suggested the role of researcher and teacher of teacher as the most prominent dimensions of his identity. To further understand identity construction through the lens of teacher educator roles and their suitability in contexts like Malawi, further research can focus on teacher educator identity from the perspective of each of the roles. This approach can bring to light the differences in teacher educator identities during and beyond the novice period.

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Data availability The research data can be available upon request from the authors.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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